

# Cabin Creek Co-op Pieces Together Art, Income For Members

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CHARLESTON AND  
CHELYAN, W. Va. — Over 80 West Virginia women (and one man) belong to Cabin Creek Quilts Co-op, a member-operated firm that is keeping the traditional art of quilting alive while providing extra money for those with limited income.

The co-op began as the project of a VISTA worker from Boston in 1970. VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) is a government program similar in purpose to The Peace Corps.

Twenty-three-year-old VISTA volunteer James Thibeault came to southeastern West Virginia originally to work on pollution control; the area is a predominantly coal mining region. But the beautiful handwork he saw being done in homes he visited sparked the idea that eventually led to the formation of a co-op.

The co-op's sole purpose is to allow members to continue the art of quilting in their homes while giving them a profitable market for their work.

Five quilters made up the original organization. The number of members fluctuates, according to marketing person Sue Adams of Cabin Creek Quilts. From a high of around 150 women, there are now 85 to 87 quilters and piecers from 11 counties who construct a line of regular products. They offer fullsize quilts, women's and children's clothing, kitchen accessories, wall hangings, wreaths, dolls and Christmas items. The co-

op also has a large custom order business.

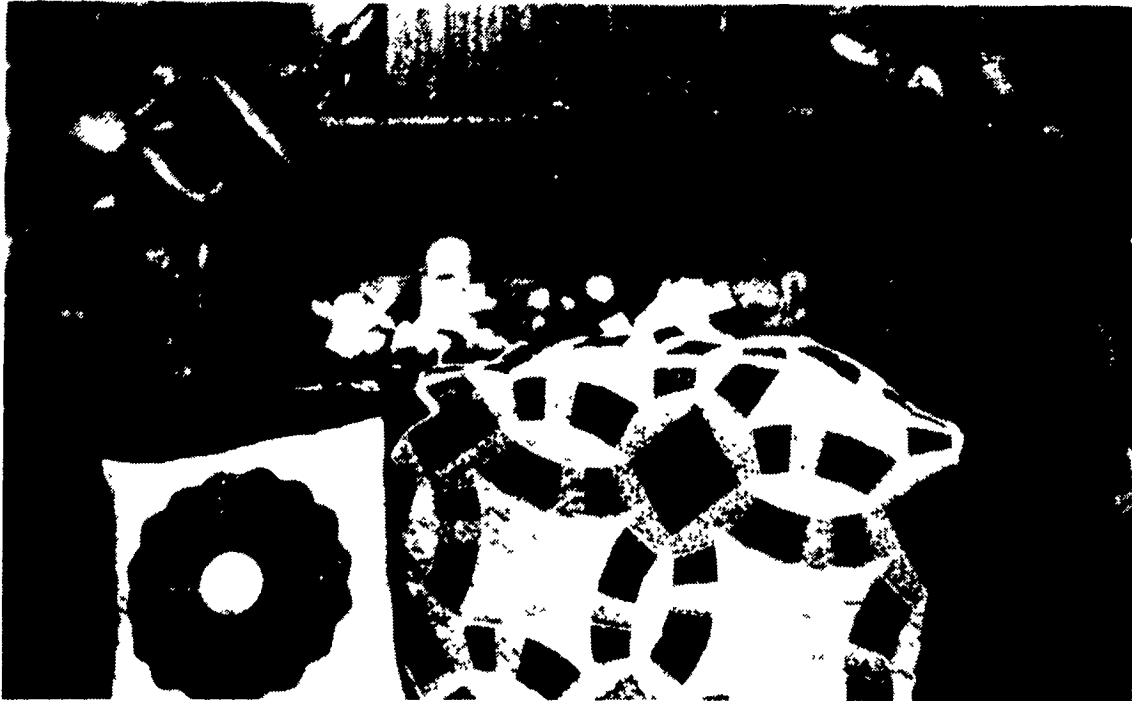
"We do a lot of special orders," says Sue Adams. These have included a Christmas tree skirt done in Wedgewood blues, completed this past week for a woman in the Eastern Panhandle, and a set of quilts for someone in the Carolinas who wanted original patterns created for her. Cabin Creek Quilts does not charge an extra fee for custom orders.

Product marketing is handled through several channels. Cabin Creek has a retail store located in Charleston, the state capital, about a 20 minute drive from the distribution center in Chelyan. Chelyan is across the Kanawha River from Cabin Creek, where it all began.

Products are wholesaled through Artisans Cooperative in Chadds Ford, Pa. and Match Co-op in Lexington, Ky. Sue Adams and a traveling helper, Charlotte Em-swiler, promote and sell Cabin Creek through publicity appearances and demonstrations throughout the country.

"We do all sizes of fairs," she says. "Our fair circuit begins in spring and will go through December." They display 25 to 30 quilts at a show, on the average.

But theirs was a humble beginning. "When they (the persons who originally went to shows) first went out, they took a pick-up truck. Then when they had the van, they'd sleep in the van, covered up in the quilts because they couldn't afford to stay in motels to go to the shows."



An attractive wooden trunk holds Cabin Creek treasure: a Double Wedding Ring quilt, a pillow done in the Dresden pattern and handmade dolls.

The co-op is now featured in some 30 to 35 shows a year in several states across the nation. Those in Florida are particularly successful, Sue reports.

One recent exhibition in Sarasota saw Cabin Creek completely sold out of small items, though they didn't sell one quilt.

Obviously, Sue noted, people in that area don't need warm bed coverings. But there was a large population of retirees from West Virginia and, "They all wanted a piece of home," Sue relates.

They also have a mail order business and were fortunate this year to receive matching funds from the Benedum Foundation to put out a full-color catalog, their first ever. The catalog is available for \$2 from the distribution center, mailing address Box 383, Cabin Creek, W. Va., 25305.

The co-op has a full-time paid co-director, Judy Parcell, and a full-time worker at the Charleston store, Donna Aaroe. All others are part time or volunteers.

The co-op's members meet once a year for their annual meeting and quilting "bee," to elect officers and make changes in the by-laws. Otherwise, members work in their homes and send their finished products to the distribution center.

"We had about 75 here this year," says Sue, looking around and smiling at the modest block building with dimensions only slightly larger than a basketball court. "We set 'em up end to end," she says with a grin.

The co-op takes special care with its quilts. "Each quilt comes with a registration card telling who



Sue Adams handles marketing at Cabin Creek Quilts, traveling around the country to exhibitions, fairs and festivals selling Cabin Creek wares. She stands in front of a "Lone Star" pattern quilt done in blues and parchment.

pieced it and who quilted it," Sue explains. "Most of the time we have the name of the person who bought the quilt." The exception is if someone purchases a quilt from a store where it was wholesaled to by the co-op.

Using the registration cards, the co-op can return a quilt needing repair to the person who originally did the work, so the quilting style can be maintained. "Each quilt is an individual work of art," she says with pride.

Quilters for the co-op range in

age from teenagers to women in their eighties. "And we have one man who is a member," Sue says.

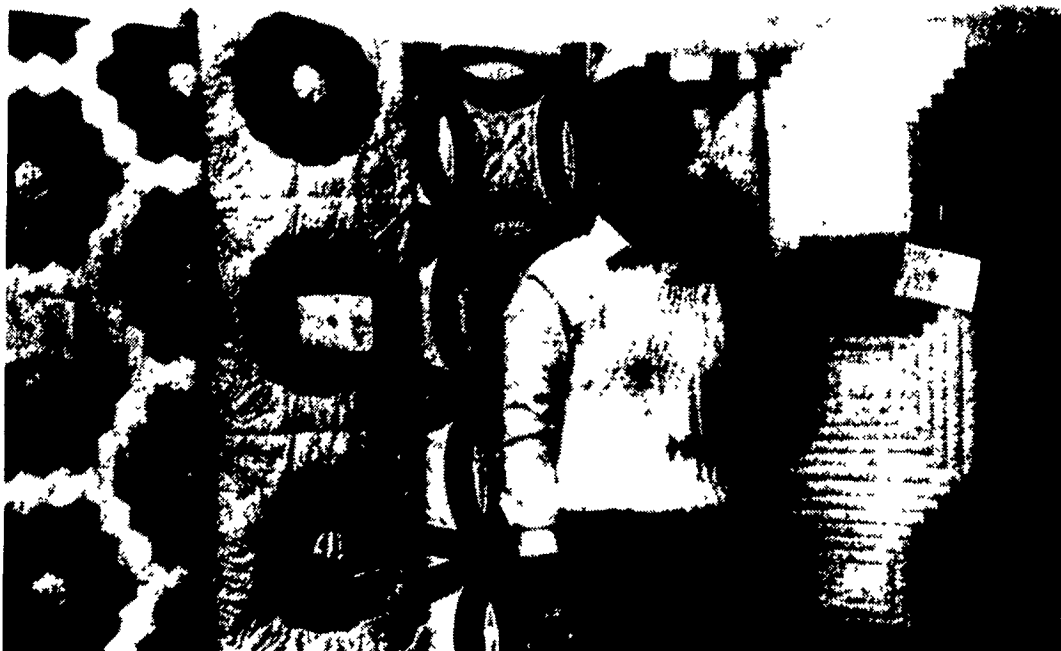
"The ladies each have something that they like to do," relates Sharon Ford, who also works at the distribution center. Some would rather piece than quilt.

When an order comes in to Cabin Creek, it is filled immediately if the item is part of the regular line. If it is a custom order or an item out of stock, the material for the top is sent to a piecer who

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Sharon Ford selects bolts of different-patterned blue fabric for placements at the Cabin Creek Quilts distribution center in Chelyan.



Donna Aaroe has worked full time in Cabin Creek's Charleston store for four years and quilted for the cooperative about a year before that. On display behind her are four member-made quilts. From left the patterns are "Dresden," "Double Wedding Ring," "Churn Dash," and "Log Cabin."

# Homestead Notes